

## Exhibit (TC 71-2)

## IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN WASHINGTON NOMINATION

Site Name: Quilomene/Colockum

County: Kittitas

Location: Central Washington - see details below

Size: Approx. 255 sq. miles

Elevation: ~500 ft. to 5370 ft.

## Introduction:

The Quilomene/Colockum region of Washington State is characterized by special habitat characteristics which make it an outstanding candidate for selection as an Important Bird Area. A large portion of the area is owned by Washington State. The majority of the sections are designated Department of Natural Resources Common School lands and Department of Wildlife areas. There are a few small U. S. Bureau of Land Management areas. The region contains two Washington State Wildlife Areas: the Quilomene and the Colockum. (The Schaafe Wildlife Area is listed on maps, but I have never seen a sign with this designation.) One Washington State Park, Ginkgo State Park is partially within its boundaries. There are some private holdings, primarily cattle grazing areas, and a few cabins. I believe that some of the State lands are leased to private individuals for grazing. Renegotiation of some of these leases will be under consideration in the near future. Much of the area is managed for elk populations. (See enclosed map for ownership designations)

Setting boundary limitations is often both arbitrary and inexact, but for purposes of designating easily-located boundaries in this area, the proposed Quilomene/Colockum IBA region is defined as follows:

In the north, the Kittitas-Chelan County Line

In the east, the Columbia River

In the south, the Vantage Highway (also called Schnebly Canyon Rd.)

In the east, the Colockum Road running from the Kittitas-Chelan County line (in T20N, R21E, Section 3) southwest to where it enters section 5 of T18N, R20E (irrigated farmland begins in this area), jogging east to the boundary between sections 2 and 3, and then directly south to the Vantage Highway.

Habitat in the Quilomene/Colockum is highly unique and valuable for many bird species. The highest elevations are located in the west and northern sections, with the Colockum Road running near the divide. Most watercourses flow from the higher elevations west to the Columbia. The higher elevation areas are characterized by mixed conifer forests. As one follows these streams to the Columbia, the cliffs become steeper, with spectacular basalt columns and rock formations. High shrub-steppe benches drop abruptly to the Columbia River between these canyons. There are many habitat types found in this area: stands of deciduous trees (cottonwood and aspen groves) and shrubs along the streams, basalt cliffs and and coulees with steep rock faces, a few freshwater

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wetlands, Ponderosa pine stands, and extensive shrub-steppe habitat. The information below was gathered from multiple trips into this area over 4 years, and from preliminary data from the Kittitas Breeding Bird Atlas project sponsored by the Seattle and Kittitas Audubon Societies.

Category 1 (sites for endangered or threatened species, or species of concern): The basalt cliffs along the Columbia River and in the canyons of the feeder streams contain excellent habitat for Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, and Peregrine Falcons (fledged young in 1999). In the substantial Shrub-steppe portions of the Quilomene/Colockum, there are many breeding records for Sage Sparrows and Sage Thrashers. Both of these species are seen frequently during the spring and early summer and are known breeders. I believe that this area contains a significant portion of Washington's breeding Sage Sparrows. One sighting of Sage Grouse has been reported by Doug Kuehn of the State Fish and Wildlife Department. Certainly this is not a substantial portion of the State's Sage Grouse population, but it does provide the possibility of an excellent recovery site for this increasingly rare species, since large areas of sagebrush are disappearing in this state. The shrub-steppe is also home to Loggerhead Shrikes, which are never common, but are found regularly and known to breed in the Quilomene/Colockum. This species is thought to be declining in Washington State. The low elevation riparian areas, with aspen groves and large cottonwoods provide nesting habitat for Lewis' Woodpeckers. One Flammulated Owl was found at a relatively high elevation and one occupied White-headed Woodpecker nest was located in a Ponderosa snag near Colockum Pass. Because of the fine representation of shrub-steppe species in this area, I believe it is a prime candidate for ecosystem-scale resource management.

Category 2: (Sites for species on the National Partners in Flight Watchlist...)

Parts of the Quilomene/Colockum are important breeding sites for Brewer's Sparrows. Confirmed and/or probable breeding status was noted for numerous sections, especially in the Quilomene area.

Category 3: (Sites for species assemblages associated with a representative, rare, or threatened natural community type in Washington)

Washington State no longer has large areas of shrub/steppe in relatively good condition. Although there has been grazing in many portions of the Quilomene/Colockum, much of that grazing appears to be either many years ago, or at relatively light intensity. There are large areas of bunchgrass habitat (*Agropyron spicatum*, primarily) interspersed with extensive sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*, primarily) - in excellent condition. With the exception of the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve, I have not seen native bunchgrasses in this abundance anywhere else in the state. There are healthy populations of almost



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all of the species which are found in Washington's shrub-steppe areas. Sage Sparrows are abundant in some areas, along with Sage Thrashers, Brewer's Sparrows, and Lark Sparrows. Western Meadowlarks are found in large numbers in the grassland areas, as are Vesper Sparrows. Loggerhead Shrikes are found regularly. Horned Larks are abundant in the rockier habitats (lithosols) which are interspersed in the shrub-steppe vegetation. Grasshopper Sparrows have been reported to the south and farther east, but have not been noted in the Quilomene/Colockum.

The Quilomene/Colockum is characterized by rocky coulees which extend up toward the ridges, gradually giving way to conifer forests. These drainages contain riparian areas - Cottonwood and Aspen groves (live trees and numerous snags) which provide nesting areas for American Kestrels, Lewis' Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and many other species such as House Wrens and Bullock's Orioles. The shrub understory (Mockorange, Chokecherry, Hawthorne) provides cover and food sources for many species. Yellow-breasted Chats were found in some riparian areas.

The basalt cliffs along the Columbia River and in the lower portions of the coulees provide undisturbed nesting sites for Peregrine Falcons, Prairie Falcons, American Kestrels, Golden Eagles, and Common Ravens. Chukars are abundant. White-throated Swifts, Violet-green Swallows, and Cliff Swallows also nest here. Canyon Wrens and Rock Wrens are found in these cliffs and rocky areas.

Pockets of Ponderosa Pine habitat are found, often midway between the open shrub-steppe habitat of lower elevations and the mixed conifer forests of the wetter, higher elevations. One White-headed Woodpecker nest was found.

Category 5: (Sites where birds regularly concentrate in significant numbers when breeding, in winter, or during migration)

5f. Although I can only speculate about percents of a given species, I would postulate that the Quilomene/Colockum contains a significant portion of Washington State's population of Sage Sparrows. This species only inhabits selected pockets of appropriate habitat in the State. Sage Sparrows are regularly found in significant numbers in the Quilomene and make the Quilomene a common destination for western Washington birders interested in shrub-steppe species. I would also speculate that this area contains a substantial percentage of the State's breeding Loggerhead Shrikes. I participated in Loggerhead Shrike Surveys near the towns of Kahlotus and Odessa, and in the Crab Creek drainage and there were not large numbers at any of these sites.

5g. Although I do not have specific data on the importance of the Columbia River as a migratory corridor, visits during early breeding season regularly turned up migrants in some of the Columbia feeder areas. I believe it is a widely held belief that a landmark corridor such as the Columbia River,

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which runs primarily north and south, serves as a vital migratory route for many species. Andy Stepniewski, who surveyed birds on the Yakima Training Center for The Nature Conservancy, theorizes that migratory passerines moving south along the Columbia in early autumn may head overland where the Columbia River turns east, since he found large concentrations of migrants in the Yakima Training Center along Cold Creek. It is also possible that many waterbirds and shorebirds use the Columbia River as a migratory route.

Summary: I believe this large and relatively pristine area is precisely the kind of nominee that the IBA project is looking for. Aside from its exquisite beauty and unique topographical features, it is characterized by a number of critical habitat features which make it an important area for many bird species. It is especially important to maintain the critical habitats in the Quilomene/Colockum because, across the Columbia to the east, most of the area bordering the River has been radically altered by reclamation efforts, resulting in large-scale loss of habitat. Designation as an IBA would enhance the prospects for further acquisition and conservation of habitat in this area and would direct attention of public land managers to its importance as a critical area for many bird species.

Respectfully submitted,

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